AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

ISRAEL VERSUS HEZBOLLAH 2006:

ASSESSING ISRAELI STRATEGY

by

Gregory D. Parsons, Colonel, USAF

A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

13 February 2008

Report Documentation Page

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE **13 FEB 2008**	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED **00-00-2008 to 00-00-2008**
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **Israel Versus Hezbollah 2006: Assessing Israeli Strategy**		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
		5b. GRANT NUMBER
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER
		5e. TASK NUMBER
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **Air University,Maxwell AFB,AL**		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
\

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**	**Same as Report (SAR)**	**35**	

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Biography

Colonel Parsons was commissioned in 1986 after completing the Reserve Officer Training School. He has had a diverse Air Force career working in three different career fields; Manpower and Organization, Personnel, and Services. His wing-level assignments include tours as Chief of a Manpower Office, a Mission Support Squadron Commander, and a Services Squadron Commander. His Headquarters staff tours include Tactical Air Command, Air Combat Command, Pacific Air Forces, Air Force Special Operations Command, and the Air Staff. He is currently attending Air War College.

EDUCATION:

2006   Air War College, by correspondence
2000   Distinguished Graduate, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base,
        Alabama, Masters in Military Arts & Sciences
1989   Masters in Management Information Systems, Golden Gate University
1986   Bachelors degree in Management Information Systems, Auburn University - Montgomery

ASSIGNMENTS:
1. Jul 2005 – Jul 2007, Deputy Director, Manpower, Personnel and Services, Headquarters Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida
2. Jul 2004 – Jul 2005, Deputy, Manpower and Organization Division, Headquarters Pacific Air Forces, Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii
3. Jun 2002 – Jun 2004, Commander, 325th Services Squadron, Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida
4. Jun 2000 - May 2002, Commander, 62nd Mission Support Squadron, McChord Air Force Base, Washington
5. August 1999 - May 2000, Student, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama
6. Nov 1995 - July 1999, Chief, Budget Development, Headquarters United States Air Force, Pentagon
7. Sep 1992 – Oct 1995, Chief, Force Structure Analysis, later Chief, Promotions and Career Development
   Section, Headquarters Air Combat Command, Langley Air Force Base, Virginia
8. Nov 1990 – Aug 1992, Chief, Manpower Office, 31st Fighter Wing, Homestead Air Force Base, Florida
8. Oct 1986 – Oct 1990, Aircraft System Computer Simulation Engineer, later, Organizational Analyst, Headquarters Tactical Air Command, Langley Air Force Base, Virginia

MAJOR AWARDS AND DECORATIONS:

Bronze Star
Meritorious Service Medal with six oak leaf clusters
Air Force Commendation Medal

ACC Junior Personnel Manager of the Year – HQ level, 1995
AMC Senior Personnel Manager of the Year – Base level, 2001
AETC Services Field Grade Officer of the Year, 2004
AF and PACAF Manpower and Organization Field Grade Officer of the Year, 2005

Introduction

This essay will assess Israel's strategy during the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War. Within this assessment I will begin by first providing an overview of the 33-day war and highlighting in the significant events of the war. I will then address Israel's march to war with Hezbollah and then conduct a historical analysis of Israel to set the proper context to address its decision making process. Afterward I will present a post war analysis from the perspective of Israel and Hezbollah, specifically addressing their war preparations and the results of their efforts. I will then briefly look at the impact of the international community on this conflict. Lastly this essay will provide an overall summary of a few of the more cogent lessons learned from the Israeli-Hezbollah War.

Overview of the Israeli-Hezbollah War

On the morning o f Wednesday 12 July 2006 at approximately 0900 local time Hezbollah initiated Operation "True Promise," a meticulously planned and coordinated operation with rocket, anti-tank missiles, mortars and sniper fire as part of a raid to kidnap Israeli soldiers.[1] Within an hour of the initial clash the Hezbollah owned and run television network in Beirut was reporting the Islamic Resistance had captured two Israeli soldiers and Israel was responding by "pounding" the fringes of Aiyt a-Shab, Ramiya, and Yaroun with artillery fire. Sayyed Nasrallah, Hezbollah secretary-general, quickly held a press conference confirming his organization had kidnapped the Israeli soldiers, stating they were safe and would only be returned as part of a prisoner swap, any military operation on Israel's part would be futile.[2] In laying out the limited aims of his operation, Nasrallah went on to state Hezbollah had no intention to start a war, but if Israel initiates a war they will pay a price.[3]

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Israel's March Toward War

Hezbollah's Operation "True Promise" precipitated Israeli retaliatory strikes against Hezbollah border observation posts and its military outposts in southern Lebanon, as well as limited attacks on infrastructure (three southern bridges over the Litani River). In response to the Nasrallah press conference, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert categorized the attack and kidnappings "as act of war… not a terror attack but an act by a sovereign state which attacked the state of Israel without reason or provocation… he promised a restrained but very painful response.[4] The choice and meaning behind the words Prime Minister Olmert used were not lost on the Lebanese government. He was placing the blame for Israel's action on Lebanon's inability/unwillingness to implement UNSCR 1559 which required Lebanon to disband all militias.[5] Prime Minister Olmert also struck a chord with the Israeli public who felt such a response was long overdue and overwhelming supported the war.[6] Consequently, the Lebanese government immediately requested the U.N. take action to prevent Israeli aggression against them, claiming they were not aware of, nor did they take responsibility for Hezbollah's attack.[7] Nonetheless, in response to the Hezbollah provocations Israeli leadership pressed ahead with its war efforts in southern Lebanon with the hope of attaining the following objectives: [8]

1. Destroy the "Iranian Western Command" before Iran acquires nuclear weapons
2. Restore Israel's deterrence credibility which had suffered after their withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000
3. Force Lebanon to assume their statehood responsibilities and end the status of Hezbollah as a state within a state
4. Significantly reduce Hezbollah's military capability
5. Return the kidnapped soldiers, without the massive prisoner swaps Hezbollah was demanding

Israel's heavy-handed response to the kidnappings surprised the Lebanese government and Hezbollah, which assumed their attack would trigger only a mild Israeli response and would ultimately lead to the prisoner exchange they desired [9] However, Israel's response was quite in line with its historic implementation of their strategy of cumulative deterrence. Israel has historically applied escalation dominance, that is, a disproportionate response to provocations in an attempt to convince the Arabs of the futility in their quest to destroy Israel. [10] These responses by Israel were generally preplanned and had specific strategic objectives, and this heavy response to the Hezbollah attack was no different. The strategic calculus behind Israel's decision was the belief Hezbollah's attack was not an isolated event, but a coordinated attack with Hamas which had attacked Israel just two weeks earlier from their Gaza border.[11] In Israel's eyes the Hezbollah attack had forced them into a two front war and they had to make a stand.[12] Further, the Hezbollah attacks and kidnapping resulted in Israel's implementation of emergency "Hannibal" procedures. These procedures have been a part of Israeli thinking for decades and are simply stated: never give in to terrorists, giving in will only encourage terrorists to capture more Israelis.[13] Therefore, not only did Israel feel compelled to act, it believed it had the moral high ground in doing so.

Israel's Historic Perspective

While the reasoning behind Israel's decision to escalate this war was very much in character, how Israel attempted to achieve these goals was not. To understand the forces that shaped this change in their strategic decision making we must first understand the historical context from which Israel was operating.

As most nations, Israel's military strategy is a by-product of its national history. However, unlike most nations, Israel's history is that of continued warfare. Born out of the

Arab-Israeli War of 1948, Israel has been a nation at war since its inception. The nation's

psyche is best summed up by its first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, who believed the Arab

rejection of Israel was irrevocable, therefore, while Israel may win battles it would always be at

war, and eventually the Arabs would be better prepared, equipped, and possibly better motivated,

so Israel must be ready to fight. Consequently, Israel developed a security concept based on

cumulative deterrence and the excessive use of force in both limited and general wars. This

concept rested on the belief Israel would be unable to militarily impose peace on the Arabs;

therefore, the goal was to persuade them to accept peace by making the price of war too high.[14]

Unfortunately for Israel, they have significant geographic, social and economic constraints which

make implementing this concept very difficult. Understanding the sacrifices it would have to

make as a nation; Israel developed a military strategy emphasizing strategic defense of the

homeland, taking the operational offensive, and forcing (and winning) short wars.[15] To

accomplish these goals against Arab nations that greatly outnumbered them, Israel invested

heavily in advanced military technology.   As a result of their investment in technology and

training, Israel became the dominant; best trained and equipped military in the Middle East.

Their unmatched dominance in the region was displayed for the entire world to see with their

stunning victories in the Six-Day War of '67 and the Yom Kippur War of '73. These victories

seemed to be a resounding confirmation of Israel's concept of cumulative deterrence, now every

Arab country knew they could not defeat Israel in a conventional war. For Israel, the lesson

learned was that their foresight and sacrifice to develop a modern military had proven to be the

right action, now they must continue to invest in its superior technological capabilities.

However, the lesson the Arabs learned was much different. Unable to confront Israel in a

conventional war, the Arabs began to search for alternative types of warfare in an attempt to

level the playing field with Israel. Arab efforts to change the status quo became apparent after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1981 and during the Intifada in the occupied territories. Both of these events provided new and crucial military lessons for Israel, some they heeded and some they did not.

Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon began in 1981 when Israel launched Operation Peace for Galilee, with the goals of: expelling the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) from southern Lebanon; establishing a security buffer in southern Lebanon; driving Syria out of Lebanon, and if possible, establish a Christian dominated government in Lebanon and negotiate a peace treaty with that government. The initial phases of Operation Peace for Galilee were, from a strictly military point of view, brilliantly executed. In less than three weeks it destroyed the PLO war machine in South Lebanon and Beirut, and while Syria did not withdraw from Lebanon, it clearly signaled it was not interested in confronting Israel.[16] Unfortunately for Israel as it transitioned into the occupation phase of the war the Arabs initiated a new type of warfare against Israel which clearly indicated status quo had changed.

The genesis of this new type of warfare was the Shi'a population of southern Lebanon. The Shi'a were initially grateful to the IDF for liberating them from the heavy-handed rule of the PLO which had terrorized their villages and population for many years. However, once they realized the IDF was not leaving, they focused their energies on removing this new occupier out southern Lebanon.[17] This resistance movement gave birth to a new Shi'ite group backed by Iran—Hezbollah.[18] This development presented Israel with two substantial problems. First, unlike the PLO, Hezbollah was indigenous and could not be easily driven out of Lebanon.[19] Second, it soon became apparent the religious fervor of Hezbollah provided Israel a far more

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potent enemy than the nationalism of the PLO… the "better motivation" Prime Minister Ben-Gurion had predicted so long ago.[20]

It was from this resistance movement Hezbollah developed its concept of guerrilla warfare, one designed, not to defeat Israel, but to liberate Lebanon from the Israeli occupiers. Hezbollah developed a simple decision regime: conduct a guerrilla war of harassment against IDF forces in Lebanon and fire Katyusha rockets into northern Israel in retaliation for the killing of Lebanese civilians by the IDF.[21] This was a new form of warfare for the IDF, and despite its numerical and qualitative advantage it was clear they were not ready.[22]

Israel's failed military strategy in Lebanon was typified in the military outposts they established throughout southern Lebanon. These outposts were established to enable Israel to control the territory; however, it soon became apparent this was a false hope. Instead, the Israeli defense forces learned a very painful lesson; a static defense in a low intensity conflict is almost impossible to protect. They essentially became sitting ducks and the subject of repeated Hezbollah attacks. The more attacks received, the more the IDF fortified the outposts. This harassment forced the IDF to ferry supplies to the outposts which then became targets of roadside bombs. Therefore, instead of controlling the territories the IDF became de facto prisoners of the Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. Unfortunately, the IDF was unable, or unwilling, to acknowledge the losing nature of this proposition and refused to abandon these outposts or increase the number of troops in the country to guarantee their safety.

Instead, IDF military strategy seemed to be dictated less by the nature of the problems it confronted on the ground and more on applying their superior weaponry. As the conflict grew Israel continued to deploy heavy, sophisticated weapons suitable for conventional warfare, but unsuitable for irregular warfare. Israel had become a slave to high-end technology and hardware

instead of relying on tactical creativity and initiative. The vast resources Israel invested in R&D

designed to deal with irregular warfare threats (e.g., the Nautilus system designed to deal with

Katyusha rockets, devices for detecting roadside explosives, and devices for protecting troops in

moving vehicles and in stationary outposts) proved to be strategically meaningless. Even when

they did improve the IDF's capacity to deal with threats, Hezbollah was more resourceful in

developing new techniques to counter them. Only on a limited scope did the IDF pursue

counterinsurgency tactics such as: mobile patrols inserted and extracted in surprise; the use of

attack helicopters; military operations conducted from the international border; or disguise; all of

which could have been more effective in tracking down and confronting the Hezbollah

guerrillas.[23]

Additionally, the war revealed major problems with Israeli Intelligence, especially during

the long irregular warfare phase of the war. Israeli Intelligence failed to assess the impact of

the Israeli occupation on the various communities in Lebanon; thus, it failed to predict the Shi'a

would continue to fight against Israel as long as it occupied southern Lebanon. This failure was

due in large part to Israel's relying exclusively on analysis of the rhetoric of Hezbollah leaders

(which does not recognize Israel's right to exist) and completely ignored Hezbollah's actions…

it was fighting a war of liberation. Lastly, it failed to realize the use of conventional means in

this irregular warfare had only served to increase the scope and intensity of Hezbollah's

operations. It became apparent the notion military force might actually exacerbate anti-Israeli

violence was not part of the strategic discourse in Israel.[24]

The Lebanese security zone became a trap for Israel that lasted fifteen years.[25] Finally

when the nation had had enough, a group of mothers of solders who had served in Lebanon,

going by the name "Four Mothers" started a public awareness campaign for the unilateral

withdrawal of Lebanon. Their campaign galvanized public opinion and once the idea of unilateral withdrawal was planted, it quickly took root.[26] Hence, the decision to withdraw was born out of an Israeli sense of defeat, the IDF was "broken," and its soldiers would do anything not to have their names added to the bottom of the soon-to-be-closed list of Lebanon war casualties.[27] As Israel pulled out of Lebanon, it became clear it lost the war, not because it wasn't powerful enough, but because it was.[28]

The second event which directly shaped Israel's strategic planning for the 2006 Hezbollah War were the two Intifadas in the occupied territories. The first Intifada occurred from December 1987 to 1991; and a second Intifada erupted in 2000 and continues on a small scale till today. The rise of the Intifada can be directly linked to the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon. Which is quite ironic since Israel's rationale for the invasion was to defeat the PLO and quell the nationalist sentiments in the West Bank and Gaza. However, their action had just the opposite effect. The PLO's defeat in southern Lebanon was instrumental in fomenting a new kind of Palestinian nationalism in the occupied territories… religious nationalism. This religious nationalism was embodied in the new organization Hamas which proved far more extreme and more willing to engage in an armed struggle… much like Hezbollah.[29]

The Intifada presented the Israelis with a new type of irregular warfare different from what it faced in southern Lebanon; mass demonstrations involving women and children. The massive demonstrations were accompanied with new weapons of choice; rocks, burned tires, and Molotov cocktails. These demonstrations and use of low tech weapons were clearly orchestrated to show the world the roles of David and Goliath had reversed in the Middle East… now Israel was the heavy handed Goliath. Again it was clear from the start the Israel was unprepared for a contest of this sort as the IDF attempted to use brute force to stop the demonstrations. However

their efforts proved ineffective as the demonstrators always seemed to find ways to evade the

IDF. All the while the international press corps was there to broadcast the images of clashes

between unarmed Palestinian civilians and the heavily armed Israeli soldiers.[30] The IDF had a

mass civil uprising on its hands; not a war fought with tanks, planes, or a border skirmish with

armed men. This type of warfare had not been included among the possibilities the army was to

take into account, once again the IDF encountered a threat it was at a loss to handle. It was

during the Intifada that Hamas unveiled their most effective weapon employed against the

Israelis; the suicide bomber. This "poor man's laser guided bomb" proved to be very successful;

it was difficult to defend against; it was a strategic threat insofar as it affected the perception of

personal security; it had a strategic impact on foreign investments, costs of services, and tourism

in Israel; and lastly, in the court of international public opinion it kept the Arabs in the role of

David against the Israeli Goliath.[31]

As the IDF became increasingly bogged down with the Intifada, their primary occupation

shifted to policing of the occupied territories; the mightiest military force in the Middle East

became nothing more than an anti-riot police force. The IDF began to show signs of strain as

more and more of its troops were deployed into the occupied territories in an attempt to crush the

Intifada (especially the infantry and newly created units designated to police the occupied

territories). This wore on unit morale and more importantly it deepened a trend toward

"demilitarization," a growing disaffection of significant elements of Israeli society with the

armed forces.[32] This growing disaffection from civilian social groups and political elites led the

IDF to increasingly rely on the standing army to deal with security challenges, in lieu of its large

reserve force, and to privatization of some defensive measures (security guards, air marshals,

embassy guards). As challenges in the occupied territories increased, a sizeable proportion of the

IDF was bogged down in dealing with the security threats, largely at the expense of preparation and training for high intensity wars.[33]

As a result of the occupation of Lebanon and the Intifada, Israel began to expend an ever larger proportion of its resources on limited warfare, in contradiction to the plan of transforming the IDF into an armed force at the front line of the RMA. Its limited warfare challenges required the IDF to widen the scope of operations as it struggled with how to defeat this type of warfare.[34] Despite their efforts, it is clear their retreat from southern Lebanon was the first clear-cut defeat for the IDF and their inability to quell the Intifada simply compounded their frustration. The image of the unbeatable Israeli army had been forever tarnished by its inability to address its low intensity warfare challenges.[35]

Israel's Decision Making Process

Hence it is clear as Israel prepared for war against Hezbollah in 2006 all these bitter lessons from their occupation of Lebanon and the Intifada weighed heavily on the Israeli leadership decision making process. Their reluctance to get involved in another ground war quickly came to light as the IDF Chief of Staff briefed the Israeli Cabinet. He laid out a ten week operation against Hezbollah with a two week air campaign focused on counter-battery fire to silence Hezbollah's rockets and mortars, followed by a six- to eight-week ground operation in southern Lebanon. He informed the cabinet it was expected the Katyusha rockets would continue to fall on Israel up to the last day of the war. He further advocated a rapid response since he believed the fighting would be stopped earlier than Israel needed due to international intervention. However, the Israeli leadership simply had no desire to become embroiled in another ground occupation in southern Lebanon, and they knew the war-weary nation would not tolerate such an action on their part. Therefore they would only approve a series of targets for an

air campaign.[36] The target set included attacks on Hezbollah's headquarters, bases, and tactical

positions in the south, and limited attacks on Beirut's international airport all in an effort to put

pressure on the government of Lebanon and weaken Hezbollah's popular support base.[37]

Therefore, the hope of attaining their war goals was placed on a strong and extensive bombing

campaign in southern Lebanon.[38] They firmly believed an air campaign of this magnitude would

eradicate Hezbollah's long-range rocket threat to Israel and demonstrate to the Arab world their

ability to reach out and inflict severe damage to any state that attacked them. They believed

airpower alone could bring a swift end to this conflict.

Understanding the world would cast them as the Goliath in this fight, they realized they

must try to manage the information warfare aspect of this fight better than they had in previous

conflicts. Hence, as they drafted their war plans they barred any attacks on the electrical power

grid or water-related installations, targets they had readily attacked in their earlier war in

Lebanon. This decision was made specifically to spare the civilian population the secondary

effects of the loss of modern life-support systems. Further it was hoped it would avoid the

negative political and international fallout associated with "attacks" on civilians that had become

almost nightly fare on T.V. sets across the world during their earlier conflicts and had always

brought international condemnation to Israel.[39] Having decided on an air campaign and having

deliberately planned to minimize civilian suffering, Israel nonetheless, they presented a strong,

harsh resolve to the outside world. As Maj Gen Adam, IDF commander of Israel's Northern

Command, stated to the press… Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) would employ the full spectrum of

their offensive capability (land, air, and sea assets) against Hezbollah targets anywhere in

Lebanon, not just southern Lebanon.40 Israel was buoyed by the United States, which had

clearly sided with Israel in this conflict. Given the post 9/11 environment and America's global

war on terror the United States was unsympathetic to calls to stop the fighting and protect

Hezbollah, a terrorist organization. Instead, the U.S. chose to let Israel fight for weeks, hoping

Israel would weaken Hezbollah militarily, force the Lebanese government to finally take control

of southern Lebanon and lastly, it was thought, giving Israel time to defeat Hezbollah would help the

spread of democracy in the Middle East.[41]

Therefore, when Hezbollah attacked Haifa with Katyusha rockets on the second day of

the war, Israel implemented their bombing plan. They initiated attacks against the runways at

Beirut International Airport and Hezbollah's Al-Manar television station in Beirut. They then

turned their attention to the fuel storage tanks at the Beirut airport. On the evening of 13 July,

the IAF began attacks on Hezbollah headquarters and "security command" targets in the

southern Shi'a neighborhoods of Beirut, beginning its campaign to eradicate the Hezbollah-

dominated areas of the Lebanese capital. However, despite these IDF air attacks there was little

evidence they were having any effect on stemming the rocket fire into Israel… despite extensive

Israeli bombing Hezbollah had managed to fire more than 500 rockets into northern Israel during

the first seven days causing the evacuation of over 300,000 Israeli civilians.[42] Hezbollah had

showed itself to be more skilled and resilient than Israel had anticipated. The IDF Air Chief

attributed their difficulties to Hezbollah's illegal establishment of their military infrastructure

within the heart of the civilian population and as a consequence the IDF was finding it difficult

to target this infrastructure accurately while attempting to avoid harming non-combatants.[43] As a

result of growing domestic pressure, Israel leadership had to adjust its strategy to include a

ground operation.[44] However, it was not until 18 July, six days after the kidnapping, that Israeli

ground forces made a major assault deep into Lebanese territory to its assault, unfortunately, still

hamstrung by the ghosts from the last Lebanese War, Israeli leadership only deployed ground

forces of very limited size into Lebanon. These forces were pitted against well prepared and

heavily dug-in fortifications, and in areas not consequential to determining the war's outcome. Not only did this violate Israel's defense doctrine by sending IDF's ground forces to areas where its adversaries were best prepared, it caused confusion in the command structure with regard to missions and objectives; units were advanced and withdrawn, and little momentum was maintained. Their armor-heavy, road-bound conventional force proved unable to keep in contact with their Hezbollah opponents. Israel's political leadership grudgingly authorized a massive call-up of reserves, three armored divisions, but it did not deploy them until the very end of the war. Even after if became clear the manner in which the IDF's ground forces were initially deployed was illogical, the traumas of 1982 continued to take their toll by preventing the adoption of coherent corrective measures.[45]

In the end the IDF Chief of Staff was correct; the international community stepped in and called an end to this war after just thirty four days. As with most conflicts that end without total victory, each side was quick to claim victory. Hezbollah claimed they had taken the best Israel had to offer and survived, while Israel claimed they had met their war objectives. Further, Israel claimed UN Security Council resolution 1701 which called for the end of hostilities recognized the legitimacy of their actions with the following provisions:

1. Established a Government of Lebanon and an international force (UNIFIL) to deploy into and secure southern Lebanon

2. Called for the Government of Lebanon to exercise its full sovereignty as a nation and to disarm Hezbollah

3. Called for Israel and Lebanon to support a permanent ceasefire and commit to developing a long-term solution

However, despite the claims of victory by both sides it seems the real answer is more difficult to determine. However, as we begin to analyze the outcomes of the war, it will become apparent while Israel did not lose the war, it definitely did not win.[46]

Post War Analysis - Israel

As the many post war reviews and commissions began to fire up in Israel and through out the world a clearer picture of what actually occurred during this 34 day war began to unfold. To better structure my analysis I'll address the impact of Israeli air and ground forces, Hezbollah's performance during the war, and finally how this war was viewed by the international community and the effect it had on the strategy of these two opponents.

The Israeli leadership touted the performance of the Israeli Air Force (IAF) as a stunning success. The IAF had conducted its first sustained, around-the-clock air campaign in its history, flying over 15, 000 sorties and delivering over 160,000 weapons into Lebanon. In a stunning 34-minute operation it destroyed all of Hezbollah's medium- and long-range Iranian made rocket launchers (which some have said was the real target of this war). The bombardment campaign destroyed over 130,000 homes and apartments in 130 villages, leveled hundreds of buildings in Beirut, downed 100 bridges, and attacked Lebanon's ports and airports… it had clearly demonstrated to the world the price that would be paid for taking on Israel. However, despite these stunning numbers it appears the results are less clear. Israel was never able to suppress Hezbollah rocket fire into northern Israel; the kidnapped soldiers were not released; and Israel received international condemnation for its brutal attacks. But most notable, just six months after the war the US Intelligence Agency stated Hezbollah leadership remained unscathed and had probably replenished its weapons stockpile with Iranian and Syrian assistance.[47] Had the air campaign really been the success Israel claimed it was? The problem was not airpower, but the belief they could win an irregular with airpower alone. In fact, they seemed to ignore the lessons of the last two irregular warfare conflicts and instead designed a conventional war to defeat Hezbollah. The fundamental flaw in their calculus was the assumption the level of destruction

they inflicted on the government of Lebanon and Hezbollah was a measure of success. However, Hezbollah is not a conventional military force or a nation-state dependent on high technology or even military equipment. It is a terrorist organization that has evolved into a political and partisan movement and has become fully woven into the fabric of Lebanese civil society. Defeating this type of enemy will take more than just destroying buildings.

In regards to the performance of the Israeli ground forces, many have blamed the lack of decisive results on the failures of political and military high command leadership. Especially in regards to their indecision on whether to use ground forces in the initial stages of the war, and the performance of those forces once they were committed. However, post war reviews have revealed Israeli leadership's decision making was shaped by what was possible for them to do on 12 July, and at that time the ground forces were not ready to mount or sustain any kind of immediate invasion of Lebanon. Further, even when the ground forces were called on later in the war, they were still unprepared, which suggests the Cabinet implemented the only option available to them at the time. [48] The seemingly unprepared nature of the Israeli government and its defense forces was indeed the most unanticipated aspect of the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war. In fact, the Israeli post-war commission found the government decision-making process and IDF were ill prepared for the war, citing it had rushed into war with out proper planning or consideration of other non-military options.[49] But what had caused the mighty Israeli army to be so unprepared? The answer seems again to point back to the Intifada where they allowed their focus to be taken away from the Northern Theater and their conventional ground war skills. Instead they concentrated on anti-riot policing and policies designed to avoid escalation of hostilities… skill sets that do not translate into an effective military fighting force.[50] The policing duties of those two conflicts seem to have drawn their energy, thinking, and resources

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away from preparations for conventional war. As a result, ammunition stocks were depleted, and contingency plans were not updated or reexamined; which resulted in a military unprepared for a strategic decision to deploy to Lebanon.[51] Hence, Israel had succumb to the tyranny of the urgent[52], concentrating its effort on Palestinian suicide bombers which while a danger, did not threaten their national security, and thus, had ignored the serious national security threat looming on its borders. This is especially disconcerting considering Israel knew about Hezbollah's build-up in southern Lebanon and even believed a military confrontation with Hezbollah was inevitable, given their acquisition of advanced offensive weapons. Instead of focusing on the fact it might have to fight a war with Hezbollah, Israel seem more content on creating policies to ensuring it did not fight another land war in Lebanon.[53] Israel was in essence looking the other way, hoping the problem in the north would go away. For six years it declined to respond with any real force against the Hezbollah attacks on the northern border for fear it would escalate into a full-scale war with Lebanon, one for which they were too occupied with the Intifada to deal with.[54] Therefore, when Hezbollah attacked on 12 July, it is really not a surprise Israel appeared to be caught unprepared. In fact, just three days before the Hezbollah attack IDF's Northern Command had even lowered the alert-level along its northern border with Lebanon. An official post-war review concluded the Israeli intelligence service had provided no early warning. Further, the report cited the lax attitude of the IDF forces as a contributing factor in the kidnapping of the ambushed patrol, stating they were operating as if they were "out on a trip rather than on an operative mission." [55]

Quality military intelligence was lacking, for while Israel was aware of the Hezbollah build up in the south, they underestimated the sophistication of Hezbollah's fortifications and had few if any details on Hezbollah's use of anti-tank and coast-to-sea missiles. In fact when an

Israeli warship was struck by a Hezbollah missile it appeared the crew was unaware Hezbollah even had a coastal defense capability.[56] This lack of intelligence was emblematic of the laxness which had infected the Israeli Defense Forces and led to disastrous results on the battlefield. Without this intelligence the ground forces did not change their tactics to match the type of warfare they were facing, they sent columns of tanks through mountainous terrain into the southern Lebanon villages where they were easy prey for the Hezbollah and their shoulder launched anti-tank missiles.[57] Since they did not go in with sufficient troops to hold the territory they were forced to fight the war on Hezbollah's terms in urban warfare where its superior weapons were least effective.[58] As a result, "just a few thousand troops managed to hold out against an army that benefited from absolute air supremacy, and major benefits on the technological level."[59]

Post War Analysis - Hezbollah

In contrast to Israel's lack of preparedness, Hezbollah was ready for war. It had carefully studied the terrain in southern Lebanon and the supporting transportation and communication systems. Likewise, they developed a keen understanding of the Israeli capabilities and deployment schedules, which allowed them to continue their Katyusha rocket attacks even when sustaining fire from Israeli forces. They were able to concentrate their forces at critical points, prepare optimum defenses, and streamline their logistical needs. From the border, where it predicted where Israel would cross, to the approaches into villages, where it laid mines and explosives, to the villages themselves, where they established firing positions and set booby traps, Hezbollah mounted an effective and economical defense.[60] As the IDF attacked or made advances on the ground, most Hezbollah fighters withdrew from their fixed border posts and prepared fire sites closer to or inside villages and towns, where they either made use of prepared

infrastructure or commandeered civilian assets. [61] The IDF quickly realized they were facing an

enemy with the latest weaponry and technology; who has studied the IDF's air operations and

methods of fighting; and had mastered the principles of stealth… he burrowed down and

concealed himself, which gave Hezbollah a tremendous advantage.[62]

Hezbollah also used the time to ingratiate itself into the fabric of the Lebanese Shi'a

population. They fully understood the success of the Islamic Resistance depended on the co-

operation and hospitality of the villagers, as well as their support.[63] After the Israelis retreated in

2000 Hezbollah moved in to rebuild or repair damaged homes and villages. Further, they

resumed their extensive support program of social services to include; hospitals, supermarkets,

schools, and scholarships for college for the Shi'a population.[64] By assuming the role of relief

provider they not only elevated their status within the Shi'a community, but their "hearts and

minds" campaign also provided them a platform for recruiting more young/energetic fighters.[65]

Once they had the support of the southern Lebanese population, Hezbollah was able to carry out

its military build-up against Israel, without interference from a weak Lebanese government that

was unable to challenge Hezbollah.

Hezbollah modernized its military weapons capabilities and honed its war time strategies.

As a result it developed the concept of a "veneer" defense, wide and thin, which forced the

Israelis to spread their offensive thrust over a larger area. Within this construct Hezbollah

widely dispersed its forces and supplies and then organized supporting cells to quickly reinforce

any of the sectors as they came under attack. An example of their taking the strategic initiative

during the interwar years was their action to close down all civilian traffic along the roads on the

rocky, uninhabited hillside running along the border with Israel. This action enabled Hezbollah

to develop a very formidable network of tunnels, bunkers and weapons depots in this hillside

stronghold. As a result, their fighters were able to endure over a month of pounding by Israeli aircraft and artillery with minimal causalities.[66] In the villages, Hezbollah had the advantage of civilian cover against attack, time to prepare for any Israeli advance, and an urban setting from which to ambush IDF forces and conduct guerrilla warfare once Israeli ground forces advanced. In preparation for the war, Hezbollah had prepared hundreds of firing positions on the outskirts of the villages and then booby-trapped the houses and buildings where it assumed the IDF would operate. Consequently, as the IDF forces approached the Lebanese villages, they were met by both gunfire and anti-tank fire from inside civilian houses. Additionally Hezbollah utilized their short-range rockets and mortars to fire on IDF forces as they maneuvered in Lebanese territory and as the IDF concentrated in occupied southern villages. Hezbollah rocket-firing positions were predominately set up along paved roads, which enabled easy access from weapon stockpiles located inside the villages, this allowed Hezbollah to conduct extensive logistical activities, making use of prepositioned materiel as well as moving arms to supply the fighters, albeit in small quantities. For instance, anti-tank missiles were moved around the south inside backpacks carried by Hezbollah operatives dressed in civilian clothes, often riding motorcycles and carrying white flags, according to Israeli intelligence.[67]

The pattern of warfare waged by Hezbollah was clearly in conflict with international laws governing armed conflict, which require making clear distinctions between civilians and combatants.[68] However, despite the illegality of using the civilian population as shields, Hezbollah, viewed the continuing presence of residents in the villages during the war as an operative advantage as well as a propaganda advantage (by presenting the civilian suffering to the international press). Accordingly, Hezbollah attempted to convince, or force, some civilians not to abandon their villages. Hezbollah operatives in several villages (such as Al-Taybeh and

Shihin) prevented the residents from escaping and in some cases even stopped fleeing residents and returned them to the villages. Thus, Hezbollah deliberately risked their safety and turned them into human shields – a war crime.[69]   Nonetheless, Hezbollah saw this practice as a necessity dictated by military considerations and that it was "in the general Islamic interest" therefore allowable. Hezbollah's denied they compelled the residents to stay behind and claimed the residents were supposed to have been evacuated before the war and the houses were therefore supposed to remain empty. Their intent was for the houses to be destroyed, but the people should not have been there. The principle was clear, a house can be destroyed, a village can be destroyed, but the homeland must be saved. [70] This is a principle of war fighting Hezbollah appears unwilling to abandon, since immediately after the war Hezbollah once again declared it has no intention of disarming or separating itself from the local Lebanese population as stipulated by Security Council Resolution 1701. Therefore, despite U.N. directives Hezbollah's operatives are disguising themselves as civilians to avoid conflicts with the Lebanese army and with UNIFIL forces. This method of hiding and melting into the population is allowing Hezbollah to rebuild and rearm itself during the post-war period, despite calls from Hezbollah's opponents to disarm the organization. [71]

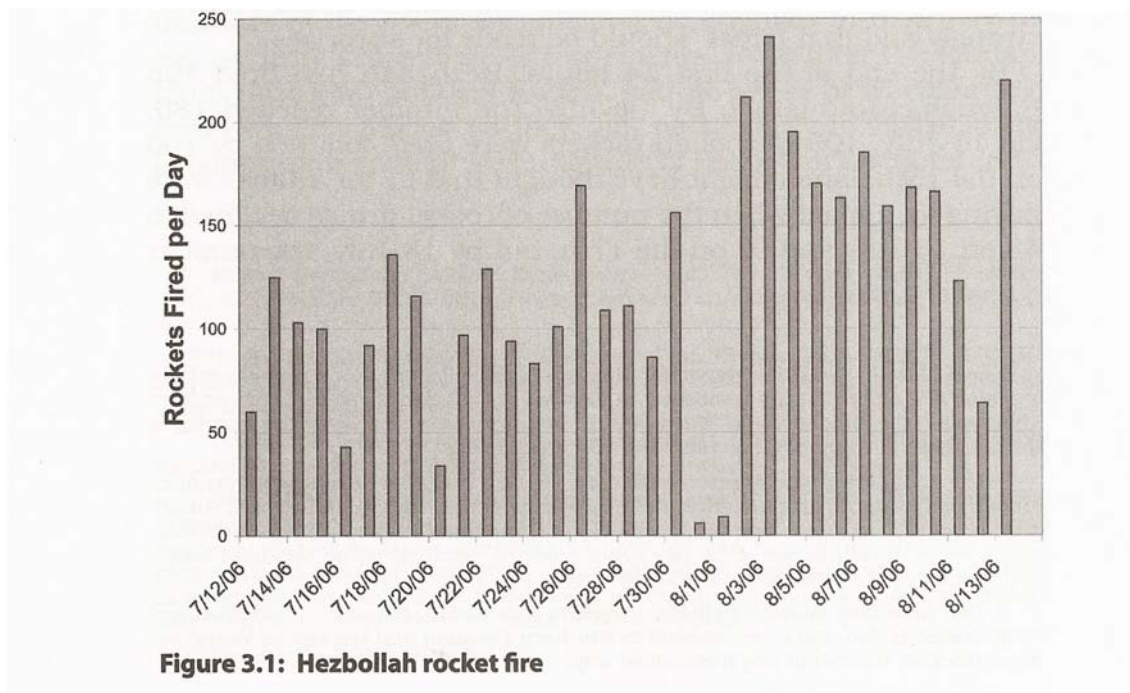## Post War Analysis – International Perspective

This brings us to how this war was viewed by the international community and the effect it had the strategy of these two opponents. Israel's concern about international opinion and the effect on its operations were well founded. This dynamic became apparent early on in this conflict, as evidenced by the negative press reports which began almost immediately with the onset of war. Prime Minister Olmert tried to preempt this by rightfully casting Israel in the role of the victim of outright aggression. He was correct in accusing Lebanon of violating chapter

seven of the UN Charter by taking aggressive action toward Israel and not fulfilling its responsibilities under UNSCR 1559, a requirement for Lebanon to exercise sovereignty over southern Lebanon and disband independent militias.[72]   However, his claims seem to fall on deaf ears in the international community. For, by 13 July when the Beirut airport attack had been the only significant strike the IDF had mounted beyond southern Lebanon, the press nevertheless was already describing significant destruction to the country of Lebanon and claiming over 50 civilians had been killed in air strikes… with another 100 wounded, and it would only get worse from there. Unfortunately the true number of civilian causalities will never be know, mainly because Hezbollah is not a uniformed army and it illegally used the civilian population as a shield. As a result, many civilian causalities were actually Hezbollah operatives rather than innocent civilians. However, that understanding takes a level of detail the mass media seldom gets to, so in their eyes the Israelis were responsible for the death of over 1,000 innocent civilians and the injury of another 3,700.[73] The news media was filled with stories, many demonstrably false, about Israeli conspiracies and misdeeds, about "illegal" weapons being used in Lebanon, about massive civilian casualties and infrastructure damage, and yet it seemed all the Israeli information apparatus could do in response was to mechanically make statements to deny the reports. This is not to condemn Israel for allowing this to happen, for they are no different than any other democracy fighting a terrorist organization. Democracies have two major weaknesses with dealing with terrorists like Hezbollah. First, terrorists have no problem using the civilian population as a shield. Although, illegal, the information warfare benefits are immeasurable. In effect Hezbollah is issuing a challenge to all democracies; either violate your own morality and come after us among innocent civilians; or maintain your morality and leave us a free hand to target your innocent civilians.[74] And don't forget, Hezbollah was targeting

innocent civilians every time they fired a Katyusha rocket filled with anti-personnel ball bearings into northern Israel… a fact that received little airplay in the media. Second, terrorists operate in a closed society unlike democracies. Hence, they control the message the media sees, you see the bombed out buildings they want you to see, not the military equipment hiding inside the civilian structures. In contrast, democracies are open to questions, critiques, second guessing, and condemnation from all sides the second a conflict kicks off.[75] Hence it is not surprising that although Hezbollah had kidnapped Israeli soldiers and was firing rockets against innocent Israeli civilians the international press community had already begun to condemn Israel's actions as "disproportionate."[76] Clearly, Hezbollah had established a stranglehold on the information battlefield.[77]

Lessons Learned

First, the Hezbollah leaders and Lebanese village militias proved far more committed to the fight than the Arab armies of 1967 or 1973: Revolutionary Islam is a far more potent motivator than the old pan-Arab nationalism or Baath-style socialism. What's more, Hezbollah had newly effective weaponry and an unprecedented level of tactical sophistication in addition to surprising cohesion. During the 2006 war Hezbollah's strategy was not on damaging Israel, but on insuring they were perceived as defying the most powerful army in the Middle East. Thus, the fact Hezbollah fired as many rockets on the last day of the war as the first was critically important (see chart below)[78] although Katyusha rockets are notoriously inaccurate and cause little damage, they are highly visible and their continued use "proved" the IDF had not badly damaged Hezbollah [79]

Figure 3.1: Hezbollah rocket fire

Once the fighting stopped, Hezbollah showed an even greater grasp of strategic communications. While the West was convening conferences to make promises about aid at some future time, Hezbollah representatives hit the streets with cash money and physical assistance. To the Arab world the contrast could not have been clearer. When Israel needed more weapons, the United States rushed them in by the planeload. When Arab families needed shelter and food, we scheduled a conference for some future date. Hezbollah acted… and gained enormous prestige by doing so. To insure they continued to dominate this critical communications campaign, Hezbollah physically prevented other agencies from distributing aid in its territory and focused on its people. The contrast between that message and the usual apathy of Arab governments to their people's needs was stunning.[80]

Second, if their enemies were tougher, the Israelis were weaker precisely where in the past their advantages had been greatest. Hamstrung in recent years between irregular warfare

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missions on the Palestinian front and the challenges of developing the means to strike at Iranian nuclear targets, the IDF had lost their edge in large-unit, conventional land warfare… a cautionary tale for the U.S. forces. Even Israel's ability to dominate on a conventional battlefield can no longer be taken for granted. The Israeli experience in Lebanon in 2006 serves as a wake-up call. Again, airpower and strike warfare did not deliver the promised results. When a land campaign was hastily initiated to attack Hezbollah formations and positions in southern Lebanon, the Israeli army was poorly prepared, either for the level of resistance encountered or for the complexity of the terrain and the quality of the defenses. You can rest assured Israel's current and potential enemies paid attention to Hezbollah's success.81

Third, Israel equated the destruction of targets with success and failed to consider the long-term consequences of its actions. As the war wound down Israel chose to destroy as much as it could in Lebanon in an effort to cripple Hezbollah. The consequence of this wonton destruction, aside from international condemnation, was a perception among Muslims that the West with all their technology to differentiate target sets truly have no regard for civil society or civilians… especially Muslims.[82] In 1967 Arafat attempted to organize a popular resistance within the occupied territories but was unable because the Palestinians were enjoying the prosperity Israeli tourism and trade had brought to the occupied territories. It was not until Israeli policies brought economic hardship to the occupied territories that the Intifada gained a footing.[83] As noted above, since Israel has become a constrained military power, maybe it's time they began to explore other options rather than their continued rush into limited wars for limited objective. A good place to start would be to provide diplomatic and economic assistance to Lebanon; hence, supporting their neighbor to the north vice their past subversive efforts might

enable Lebanon to provide Israel the security it desires without an Israeli invasion every few years.

Lastly, Israel has not fought a "war of survival' since the Yom Kippur War of 1973 (over thirty years ago). Their wars since that time have been fought for limited objectives with limited forces. Becoming the preeminent military power in the Middle East (and also a nuclear power) has brought with it an increased obligation to act responsibly when exercising that power. Hence, Israel now finds itself in the same quandary as other military powers, namely, grappling with the difficulty of fighting and winning limited wars against an opponent fighting an unlimited war of survival. Further, the weapons available to these opponents now provide them the capability to wreak destruction and lethality on a scale never seen before. The advancement of technology has resulted in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the availability of advanced technology, and the exponential growth in access to information.[84] These new capabilities coupled with battlefield successes (e.g., Hezbollah) will only emboldened future opponents. Hence, Israel's outmanned and outgunned opponents will continue their attempts to destroy Israel… and technology advances may give them the capability to do just that. All the while, Israel, much like the United States, will find it harder to take decisive action… for they are now constrained by the international laws of armed conflict, the all seeing eye of the media, and the condemnation of international public opinion.

Conclusion

Within this assessment of the 33-day 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War I examined both the real-time and historical considerations that affected Israel's decision to invade Lebanon. I

further provided an analysis of both Israel and Hezbollah and how they prepared, or failed to prepare, themselves for the next war after the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000. Additionally I looked at the impact the international community had on the 2006 war, specifically addressing the overwhelming advantages Hezbollah enjoyed vis-à-vis Israel. Lastly, I provided an overall summary of a few of the more cogent lessons learned from the Israeli-Hezbollah War which applied not just to Israel, but have direct implications to America.

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